



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe  
National Forest

September 2020

# **SCOPING AND NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION AND OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT**

## **SOUTH JERRITT EXPLORATION PROJECT**

**Mountain City, Ruby Mountains and Jarbidge Ranger District**

### **USDA NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, Jarbidge Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for Jerriitt Canyon Gold LLC's (Jerriitt) South Jerriitt Exploration Project (Project) administered by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (USFS) and private land in Elko County, Nevada. This notice serves as the invitation to provide scoping comments as provided for under the NEPA at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500, and notification of opportunity to comment as provided for under the USFS' administrative review regulations at 36 CFR 218.24. This Project is not authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) and is subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process under 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. The Project's Plans of Operations and a detailed map can be found at:

[https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=58700](https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=58700)

Section 106 under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, requires federal agencies such as the US Forest Service (USFS) to identify and consider potential effects of its actions on historic properties. This is done through a collaborative framework of seeking, discussing, and considering views of the public on how potential adverse effects on historic properties resulting from a proposed Federal action should be addressed. The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest will be using the NEPA scoping process in lieu of public involvement requirements found in 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the NHPA (54 U.S.C. 306108).

**DECISION FRAMEWORK**

This Project proposal will be analyzed in an EA as required by the NEPA and 36 CFR 220. Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure documented in the EA, the Responsible Officials would decide: 1) whether to select the Proposed Action as proposed or modified, or as described in an alternative; 2) what mitigation measures, if needed, would be required; 3) what monitoring, if any, would be required; or if 4) an EIS would be required.

**PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The USFS's purpose is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally-administered lands under the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, and with other laws and regulations including the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986. The USFS's need is to respond to the proponent's submittal of the Project Plan of Operations and ensure operations would be conducted so as, where feasible, to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest System surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A). The proponent's purpose and need is to explore for mineral deposits within the proposed Project Area in order to identify mineral resources that can support the U.S. economy and bring to market needed commodities.

**LOCATION**

Jerriitt proposes to conduct a seven year exploration drilling program for locatable minerals in the vicinity of the Jerriitt Canyon Mine located in the Independence Range approximately 50 miles north of Elko, Nevada. The project area is located in all or portions of Township(T) 41N, Range(R) 53E; T.40N., R.53E.; T.40N., R.54E.; T.39N., R.53E.; and T.39N., R.54E.; MDBM, Elko County, Nevada, (Project Area) as shown on the map below. State Highway 225 provides access to the paved mine entrance road that leads to the project area.

**PROPOSED PROJECT OVERVIEW AND ACTION SUMMARY**

The proposal is an exploration-only program that consists of drilling for locatable precious metals over the next seven years. Exploration activities would include the following under this Project: temporary road and drill pad construction, exploration drill holes, monitor wells, trenching and sumps. Through the duration and completion of the Project, no more than 500 acres of total surface disturbance would be exceeded. Project activities would be implemented using the appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) established by the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP), BMPs for Water Quality Management on NFS lands, and the Nevada Division of Conservation Districts, Handbook of Best Management Practices (NDEP 1994). Drilling activities would be seasonal, as weather permits; surface disturbing activities and drilling would be avoided from March 1 to June 30 to reduce impacts to sage grouse habitat, Lahontan cutthroat trout habitat, migratory birds and other wildlife species. Raptor nest buffers would be avoided from March 1 to August 31 of each year.

The temporary road construction of the Project as shown on the attached map would consist of a total of 500 acres of disturbance in the Project Area. Existing roads would be used where possible. Up to 1,100 drill pads would be constructed and would be approximately 70 feet long x 40 feet wide. In order to minimize surface disturbance, multiple drill holes may be drilled at each pad using different angles that vary from 45 to 90 degrees; however, most pads would only have one drill hole per pad since the majority of the drilling would be vertical. Jerritt would use a core or reverse circulation drill rig to test the geologic targets. The 1,100 drill pads would be positioned within the new road construction or on pre-existing roads to minimize surface disturbance. New drill roads or drill pad construction in any drainage would not exceed thresholds for surface water quality impacts. No water or drilling effluent would be allowed to flow uncontrolled from drill sumps. Up to 15 drill holes may be open at any one time for a period not to exceed 60 days without proper approval from the NDEP and USFS. Open drill holes would be securely equipped with locking caps and plugged with bentonite by tremie or cased prior to re-entering. All drill holes would be plugged according to specifications in Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 534 and guidance from the USFS and/or Bureau of Mining Regulation and Reclamation (BMRR). Water used for the Project would be obtained from existing water rights from the mine.

Jerritt has committed to no direct impacts to eligible cultural sites or unevaluated sites, as well as, no direct impacts to threatened or endangered or sensitive plant species during all periods of drilling and road construction. Jerritt would use appropriate BMPs for its exploration activities to control runoff, keep all generated sediment from entering existing drainages, and prevent rill development on active and reclaimed slopes. Jerritt would reclaim disturbed areas by recontouring and reseeding with a USFS approved weed-free seed mix to minimize soil erosion and water runoff sediment issues and protect fish and wildlife habitat. Concurrent reclamation practices would be implemented to reclaim an equal amount or greater number of acres of past exploration disturbance within the Jerritt Canyon mine prior to creating new disturbance under this Project. This would result in no net increase in surface disturbance. In addition, interim reclamation practices such as temporary seeding would occur seasonally to stabilize and minimize soil erosion.

**SOLICITATION OF COMMENTS, COMMENT PROCESS, AND TIME FRAME FOR SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS**

The USFS is now seeking public comments specific to the proposed Project. The purpose for this comment period is: to provide opportunity for public participation prior to a decision by the Responsible Official. In addition, submission of comments during this period is required to establish objection eligibility subject to *36 CFR 218 subparts (a) and (b)*; and to meet the NEPA requirements for public scoping.

In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the Project must be submitted during this Scoping and Notice of Proposed Action (SNOPA) and Opportunity to Comment period. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. This project is not authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA); however it is subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process under 36 CFR 218 Subparts (A) and (B). It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection under 36 CFR 218.

Written and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Elko Daily Free Press*, newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to Josh Nicholes, District Ranger, 660 South 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 108, Elko, Nevada 89801. Electronic comments can be submitted using the project webpage at: [https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=58700](https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=58700) To submit comments using the web form, select “Comment/Object on Project” under “Get Connected” on the right panel of the project’s webpage.

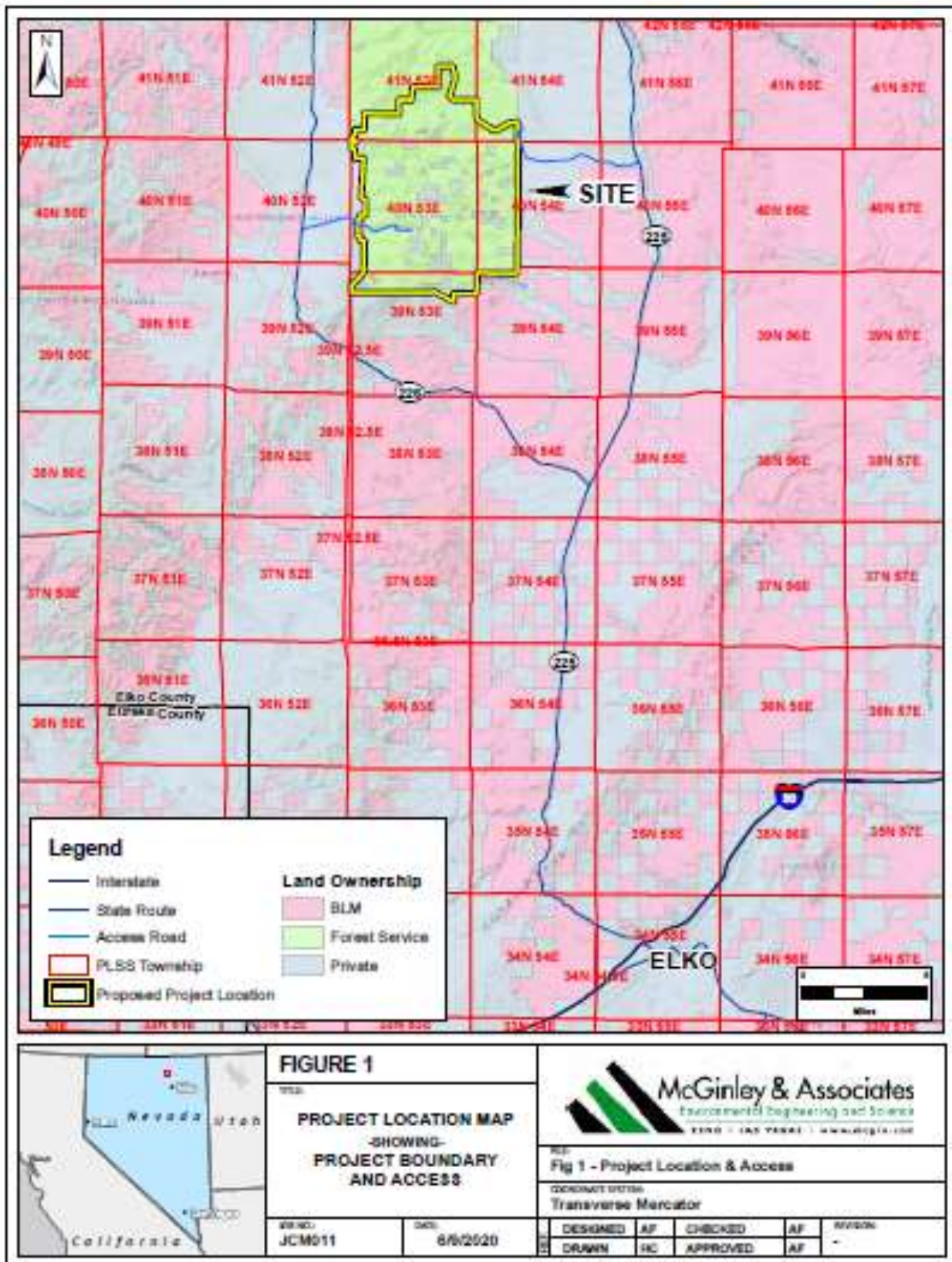
For objection eligibility each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this Project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For more information on this Project, please contact Josh Nicholes, District Ranger at 775-778-6109. Project information can also be found on the project webpage at:

[https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=58700](https://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=58700)

Attachment: Figure 1 – Project Location & Access



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